Someone you know

A Publication by Ground Zero

WE CARE ABOUT OUR KIDS
SPOTLIGHT: GAY, LESBIAN AND BISEXUAL YOUTH

Lesbian, gay and bisexual youth at Colorado Springs Gay Pride Parade

COMING OF AGE
by David Torrey

Gay youth in Colorado Springs? You bet. There's even a gay youth support group. Woa! That was even a surprise to me. When I was a teenager in the San Francisco Bay Area in the 1980's I had never heard of such a thing. That doesn't mean that gay youth group didn't exist, just that I hadn't heard of them. If I had, I certainly wouldn't have attended.

At that time I was in High School and was a constant target for "fag-bashing." I was not about to admit to anyone the feelings I had for my own gender. The teenage years were hard enough. I did not want to make myself a prime target as I had just about all I could take of the harassment.

Even today, it's hard to grow up gay. But thanks to programs like the Inside/Out Youth Group here in Colorado Springs, gay youth such as David Ramsey and Allyson Vaughan have a place to go for support, should they choose to honest with themselves about who they really are.

DAVID'S STORY

David Ramsey, a 21 year old resident of Colorado Springs, first admitted his awkward feelings when he was 14 to his mother and again when he was 16. Both times she blew him off. But when he told her at the age of 18, he says that's when it sunk in with her.

He remembers her saying something that blew him away; "So many people search all their lives to find out who they are," she told him, "you're lucky to know at such a young age."

With support like that, who needs therapy.

David happily concedes that even his stepfather, whom he thought would have a problem with his gayness, reacted supportively. At school, David didn't find too much trouble, either.

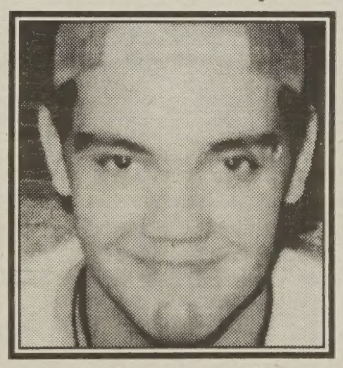
At 17, David came out to a friend in school. Of course, the news spread rapidly. Fortunately, unlike many other coming out horror stories, David really didn't have much trouble. It was a small school in Grove, Oklahoma, and David says he guesses that he just wasn't perceived as a threat. Every once in a while, though, he would overhear a comment or two while walking down the hall.

"I didn't react outwardly to them," David said, "I just blew them off. I figured by doing that, I put the spotlight back on them showing that they were the ones with the problem."

David attributes being able to do this because of all the positive support he received from family and friends, and also from the gay youth group he attended.

"The positive outweighed the negative," David affirms.

David was lucky. Today he thanks God for all the positive



David Ramsey, age 21

support he received. He is especially grateful for getting involved in the youth group. He says that it is important to be able to go somewhere and just be yourself,

see YOUTH, page 2

EDITORIAL: SUPPORT OUR YOUTH
by Regina DiPadova, Counselor

Lesbian, gay and bisexual adolescents face tremendous challenges to growing up physically and mentally healthy in a culture that is almost uniformly anit-homosexual. Often, these youth face an increased risk of medical and psychological problems, caused not by their sexual orientation, but by society's extremely negative reaction to it.

For the last five years, El Paso County Health Department of Helath and Enviornment, Mcmaster Center for Drug and Alchohol Treatment has been providing a GLB youth support group, "Inside/Out," serving more than 150 at risk youth. Currently 50-60 youth attend weekly.

For the past nine months the McMaster Center has been the lead agency in establishing a community-based coalition: Advocates for GLB. Their mission is to respond to the needs of GLB youth residing in the Pikes Peak Region. The GLB advocacy coaltion's mission is to: 1) challenge discrimination against GLB youth, 2) provide education and resources, 3) create safe enviornments for socialization activities and, 4) raise funds for GLB youth recreation activities.

Further community involvement and support is needed. Current organizations' board representatives are S-CAP, PFLAG, Springs Magazine, Colorado College, UCCS, local teachers therapists and others.

GLB youth are at high risk for serious social, emotional and health problems. The greatest tragedy is that such problems are preventable. No single agency can tackle these problems alone.

Your support is needed. You can help by being a part of this coalition. If you need more information, please call me at 578-3160.

THE INSIDE/OUT YOUTH GROUP ORIGINS

Agency Background

For over 20 years the McMaster Center for Drug/Alchohol treatment, a division of the El Paso County Department of Health and Enviornent, has served the ennds of alchohol and other drug addictive adults and adolescents.

In 1990, the center set a presedence by designing and implementing a support group for gay, lesbian and bisexual (GLB) youth. The political climate of Colorado Springs at that time was not one which supported such a community, therefore, they persevered.

SInce the inception of Inside/Out five and a half years ago, the support groups have caught the attention o fmany. Three other health departments of Colorado have used the program format and sought counseltation of Inside/Out for their communities.

Inside/Out satff have been interviewed on local television and radio talk shows to inform and education the public of GLB youth issues. They have presented to statewide drug and alchohol conventions and have spoken to local social service irganizations service youth and GLB needs. They have been a resource to many local an dnational newspapters and magazines.

Inside/Out has collaborated with other organizations to combat homophobia in our schools. Inside/Out will be presenting at the American Public Health Association Annual Conference in New York City to discuss their accomplishments and program design.

Our latest project has been establishing a lical coalition, Advocation for GLB Youth, that comprise of community leaders in Colorado Springs. Advocates for GLB youth mission is to respond to the needs of GLB youth resideing in the Pike Peak region.

The Inside/Out program has grown beyond the scope of the Health Departement's services. Presently, 50-60 youth attend the weekly group. We will continue to provide free services to youth who need HIV/STD testing, drug and alchohol counseling, or any other counseling services to support their struggle of sexual identity.'

YOUTH cont from page 1

to be able to talk about whatever is on your mind, whatever is bothering you. Without that, he thinks he may have become just another statistic.

When he moved to Albuquerque at 18, David got involved in the youth group there, too. This time, David decided to give back some of what was given to him and helped facilitate some of the groups. Now, in Colorado Springs, David is again involved, and once again he hopes to give back and help other gay youth be more comfortable with who they are. He admits he also wants to become involved in the gay movement and to help make it easier for people who come after him.

David is an optimist. He believes that "if people can act, like they have through my experience, we may have a world where the youth of tomorrow can live without fear, worry and pain."

ALLYSON

Allyson Vaughan is another member of the Colorado Springs Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual youth group, and is also a friend of David Ramsey. Like David, she also displayed great courage by coming out at the age to 16. Her mother, she says, thought it was just a phase. Now, two years later, Allyson's relationship with her mother over this issue has improved.

Like other teenagers, Allyson had trouble in school when she first came out. Some people stopped being her friend for fear that she would hit on them. That hurt. But, she also says that she finally realized that they weren't really her friends if they treated her like that. Other students, on the contrary, were supportive and said they already knew. Of her classmates who weren't supportive initially, some of them ended up changing their minds.

Allyson Vaughan

Allyson says she was very involved in High School, especially in sports. Her teammates would constantly harass her. After a while, though, it stopped. She says that some of them finally realized "that gays are people, too, and that there is nothing different between gays and straights."

In another incident, a girl who had called her a Dyke at Rampart High School ended up apologizing to her after the school had someone speak on the subject of homosexuality. The girl told Allyson she didn't realize the whole thing about being gay.

"That felt really good," Allyson said.

Because of this, Allyson believes that education can be a major key in breaking down the barriers of ignorance that has caused many gay youth heartache, pain and death. Allyson wants to tell the world that we need to communicate with each other over this issue, and that "we (as gays) are people, too, and no different than your next door neighbor." My sentiments exactly.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Allyson, like David, received much support from youth groups like Inside/Out. I am glad that gay youth of today have a place that they can go for support. Though I did not have anything like that, I still believe that I had it better than the generation before me. That is why I write this article, to help perpetuate the freedoms I enjoy, that were fought for and won by people risking their lives to make this world a better place for the next generation. By their examples, David and Allyson, possibly unknowingly, are continuing to ensure that the youth of tomorrow inherit a more peaceful and safer world.

David Torrey is a local freelance writer student at Pikes Peak Community College.

LOCAL GAY YOUTH: FACING REALITY, REACHING FOR THE STARS

by Julie Cooper

Mark Laraway begins his freshman year at the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley this fall. He plans to major in sports medicine and minor in the performing arts. Eventually,he wants to work for the United States Olympic Committee, "but I know I'll have to pay my dues first."

Mark would like to pay those dues by helping young athletes develop their skills in a physically healthy enviornment through high school and college athletics. But how does his performing arts major fit into all this?

"It's a way of expressing myself," Mark said. "It's my outlet, it's my sanctuary. It's a place where I can feel free and be myself. And besides, sports can be very dramatic"

Mark is a very expressive young man. He knows what he feels, he knows who he is and he know what he wants. He also knows that he's gay.

Mark knew he was different as far back as grade school, but didn't have a name for this sense of difference he felt. He knew he preferred to play with the girls and enjoyed hanging out with them, especially when they talked about boys. Mark realized his attraction to boys in Junior High, and came out to his parents when he was in High School.

"The people I knew when I came out were very supportive, most of my friends were very accepting,"Mark recalls.

He had a few skirmishes in High School, but nothing he couldn't handle.

Youth from across the state march in Colorado Springs Pride Parade June 1995.

"Mostly they were kids who didn't have a clue about what being gay means, so I just ignored them," Mark said.

Mark is glad he came out at an early age and feels lucky to have had such a supportive and understanding family during his coming out process. Other kids are not so lucky, as Mark soon found out.

"I was actually dragged to my first Inside/Out Youth Group meeting,"he remembers. "I didn't think I needed to be there." But Mark did need to be there, not for himself, but for the others whose coming out experience hasn't beens so positive; in fact, some downright nightmarish. He quickly became someone the other kids looked up to and became a leader and mentor in the group.

"I was a mother hen to new kids coming into the group," Mark said. "I feel I really helped other kids in their coming out process. It's a great experience to really be there for someone else. This has been a big part of my life."

Mark plans to continue being involved in gay organizations on campus and beyond, both on personal and organizational levels.

Yet, he struggles with the anti-gay rhetoric he hears on a daily basis and doesn't understand how "they" can get away with telling out and out lies about himself, about those kids in the youth group, about the people he knows and loves.

"It's very disheartening to me," Mark said."Who would choose to live a lifestyle in which others could make your life a living hell? People need to understand that."

But he does understand the fear that surrounds coming out: the fear of rejection, fear of loosing your friends, family, job, children, and / or your home.

"A certain amount of fear is healthy,but don't let it control you," Mark advises. "The longer you wait to come out after you know you're gay, the harder it is to come out. Being someone you're not is not what you're put on this earth for."

Mark offers some words of wisdom, born out of personal experience, for youth struggling with their sexual identity.

"No matter whatever feelings you may have, take your time.Sort through the feelings, understand them, and talk to someone who understands. And know that you're not alone.

"There are other gay kids out there. If you come forward, come out in a supportive enviornment. Find out where there is a gay youth group and go to it. The earlier you do that the stronger and better off you'll be." Touche.

The world is waiting for you, Mark. Keep up the great work with gay kids. Be strong. Live proud. We're proud of you.

EVERYTHING POSSIBIE

by Fred Small

We have cleared off the table,
leftovers saved
Washed the dishes and put them
away
I have told you a story and tucked
you in tight
At the end of your knockabout day.

As the moon set its sails to carry
you to sleep
over the midnight sea
I will sing you a song
no one sang to me
May it keep you good company.

You can be anybody you want to be
You can love whomever you will
You can travel any country where
your heart leads
And know I will love you still.

You can live by yourself, you can
gather friends around
You can choose one special one
And the only measure of your words
a nd your deeds
Will be the love you leave behind
when you're done.

There are girls who up strong
and bold
There are boys quiet and kind
Some race on ahead,
some follow behind
Some go in their own way and time.

Some women love women,
some men love men
Some raise children, some never do
You can dream all the day never
reaching the end
Of everything possible for you.

Don't be rattled by names,
by taunts, by games
But seek out spirits true
If you give your friends the best
part of you
They will give the same back to you.

You can be anybody you want to be
You can love whomever you will
You can travel any country where
your heart leads
And know I will love you still.

You can live by yourself, you can
gather friends round
You can choose one special one
And the only measure of your words
and your deeds
Will be the love you leave behind
when you're done.

Words and music by Fred Small, 1983, Pine Barrens Music, From the album Everything Possible:Fred Small in Concert. Available from Small Potatoes at (800) 788-6043

FACTS AND BRIEFINGS

VIOLENCE AGAINST GAY YOUTH

Interviews at gay and lesbian youth centers have revealed that 30% of interviewees report that they have attempted suicide, 40% that they have suffered from violence at the hands of peers or family members, and 26% report that they had to leave home because of rejection by family members. (It is estimated that nearly half of New York City's 15,000 homeless street youth are gay or lesbian.)

- Out With It - Gay and Straight Teens Write About Homosexuality, 1996

CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL STUDY

Results of a 1992 study by Children's Hospital in Denver show the following:

* The risk of being abused by the heterosexual partner of a child's parent is over 100 times greater than the risk of being sexually molested by a homosexual or bisexual.

* Less than 3% of children were alleged to have been molested by a stranger.

*Boys represent 18.5% of those molested by adults, while 81.5% were girls. 94% of the girls were abused by adult men and often by a male relative.

- *Pediatrics*, July 1994

CONGRESS AND THE RELIGIOUS POLITICAL EXTREMISTS

The Congressional hearings "Parents, Schools, and Values," promoted by Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich and Lou Sheldon of Traditional Values Coalition (TVC), were held December 1995, by a House subcommittee. Some of the witnesses at the hearings spoke against HIV / AIDS prevention programs in the schools and sex education in general,. In contrast, The Center for Disease Control and Prevention reports that 50% of new HIV infections in 1994 were in persons 23 years of age and younger.

- Crossroads, Winter / Spring 1996

A GOOD READ

A good book for young persons who might be questioning their sexuality or who want to understand homosexuality is Am I Blue?, Coming Out From the Silence, edited by Marion Dane Bauer, dedicated "for all young people in their search for themselves." this book is an anthology of short stories with gay and lesbian themes.

ALIENATING OUR YOUTH

Young gays and lesbians still grow up-even in big cities -- with intense feelings of isolation and alienation from their deepest feelings. Their ardor for a partner of the same sex does not jibe with the expectations of their families, friends, schools, faith, or selves. Many know they would be condemned by all of these elements of their world if they affirmed their difference.

Youth of faith are confronted by a religious establishment that, in large part, condemns all homosexual activity, although some denominations affirm gay and lesbian members and bless same-sex unions.

Hardest of all for young gays and lesbians is the prospect of alienation from their families. They may live in homes where homosexuals are openly reviled. Indeed, some gays and lesbians go through their entire life never being asked by their families if they're gay and never telling.

Family reactions to a child's homosexuality are so unpredictable, in fact, that is inadvisable to encourage a young person to come out to their family unless they have a job and a place to stay.

"Liberal" parents sometimes throw their own gay kids out of the house; conservative fundamentalists are capable of objecting to homosexuality without exiling their children.

- "Coming Out, Coming Of Age; Growing Up in the Gay 90's," by Andre Humm, M.P.H., reprinted with permission from the book, Out With It, Gay and Straight Teens Write About Homosexuality.

This book is available for $8.00 from Young Communication, 144 West 27th Street - 8R, New York, NY 10001.

For more information on Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Youth, please call:

The Inside/Out YouthGroup
578-3160
or
Parents, Family and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)
575-8658

THOUSANDS STAND FOR CHILDREN

by Wendy Johnson, Washington Blade staff writer reprinted with permission from the Washington Blade, June 7, 1996 issue

Gay people were among the hundreds of thousands who took a "Stand For Children" Saturday, June 1, when the Children's Defense Fund staged a massive rally at the Lincoln Memorial to focus national attention on the needs of children.

Among the scores of information tables were those staffed by such Gay groups as the Human Rights Campaign, the Sexual Minority Youth Assistance League, and the National Advocacy Coalition on Youth and Sexual Orientation. Other supportive groups such as Parents, Family and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Teachers Network, and the Unitarian Universalists Church also staffed tables, handed out information packets, sold books, buttons, bumper stickers, and T-Shirts.

Two openly Gay speakers were also included in the line-up of stage events.

"When I was in school, I felt like I was the only gay person in the world," said openly gay actor Wilson Cruz, who addressed a crowd of roughly 500 young people from the Youth Stage, one of three stages at the event. "Well, I'm here to stand for you and your right to be different. I'm here to tell you that you're not alone," said Cruz, who portrayed bisexual high school student Ricky on the television series *My So-Called Life*.

Sean Sasser, HRC spokesperson and openly Gay AIDS activist, spoke later from the Youth Stage about HIV prevention and coming out.

"It's so important for kids to know they aren't alone," said Rea Carey, NACYSO executive director, during the rally. "Most Gay and Lesbian youth live in the world of youth, not in the Adult Gay Community. They don't see themselves represented. I've seen teenagers walking with their parents who look at the pink triangles we're wearing and give us this knowing look, like 'I know what that means.'"

Carey worked behind the scenes for months to make sure Gay youth issues would be addressed at the event. Carey said Gay groups were asked to sign on as sponsors but were not invited to participate in the event. So, in early May, she wrote to CDF president Marian Wright Edelman as asked that Gay youth issues be addressed at the event. As a result, Carey said, the two Gay speakers were added at the last minute, and gay tables were sprinkled throughout the rally.

"We got a really good response from people who stopped by," said Kim Mills, HRC spokesperson, adding that the HRC signed up 170 new members. "That's a very, very healthy number."

PFLAG also fared well with it's outreach efforts.

"People are coming up and saying, 'Oh, thank God you're here,'" said a PFLAG father from central New Jersey as he staffed PFLAG's table. "Other folks are just coming by the table and grabbing stuff because there's no other source of information that's unbiased about who we are."

Craig Bowman, executive of SMYAL, said there was "a lot of interest in SMYAL throughout the day. Folks had very positive reactions. Some gave us donations, some asked us to mail them information, some just smiled politely and kept on walking. We had no negative responses."

Although there were negative reactions to the larger event itself, little was said about gay involvement with it. The right-wing Heritage Foundation slammed the event as "a continuation of a calculated strategy...to expand the welfare state." In a statement that was subdued in its gay-related comments, the Christian Coalition on May 30 faxed an "Action Alert" which alerted members that such groups as the National Organization for Women, the Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund, Planned Parenthood, and the HRC were among Stand For Children's roughly 3,000 sponsors, while "true pro-family groups like the Christian Coalition are pushing for legislation that will help families and their children...not weaken them!"

"The radical right clearly understands that the way to get to a certain community is through the youth," said Carey. "We also need to recognize that our community encompasses people of all ages. It is as important for the gay adult community to support youth events as it is for Gay youth to support Gay and Lesbian issues."

THE COMING OUT PROCESS: DEVELOPING A *POSITIVE* IDENTITY AS A YOUNG LESBIAN OR GAY MAN
— El Paso County Department of Health and Enviornment's McMaster Center

Awareness of Being Different	**6-9 years of age**
Awareness of Homosexual Feelings	**8-11 years of age**
First Same Sex Experiences	**10-13 years of age**
First Context of What Being Gay Means	**12-15 years of age**
Self Identifying as Gay or Lesbian	**14-17 years of age**
Identifying to Others as Gay or Lesbian	**16-25 years of age**

VOICES

"I feel very lucky to be in the States because I have a chance to express my sexual orientation in a healthy way. Many teens like me don't have the same chances. I feel very sorry that their voices cannot be heard. Life is so much tougher when the enviornment you live in prohibits your real identity."

— a 16-year-old Chinese immigrant presently living in Texas

"If a child is born and raised in a home that is loving and nurturing, where there is complete truth about who you are, you can't give a child any greater place from which to fly."

— Amanda Bearse, actress, *Married With Children*

"How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world."

— Anne Frank, teenager

"A new culture has sprung up ... a pioneering group of teenagers who identify themselves as gay or lesbian. They challenge a hundred years of social oppression, secrecy, and silence on the rights of those who desire the same sex, When they 'come out of the closet' and courageously reveal themselves to their families, friends, teachers and employers ... these youth are a new cultural phenomenon; a generation who identify themselves as lesbian or gay, the first ever in human history."

— Gilbert Herdt & Andrew Boxer, *Children of the Horizons*, 1993

DID YOU KNOW

... that the word "faggot" is believed to come from the "witch burning" times when men who were percieved to be homosexual were publically tarred and feathered and used as fuel (the word faggot initially meant a meduim-sized piece of wood) to aid in the burning of women accused of practicing witchcraft?

Think twice before calling anyone a "faggot."

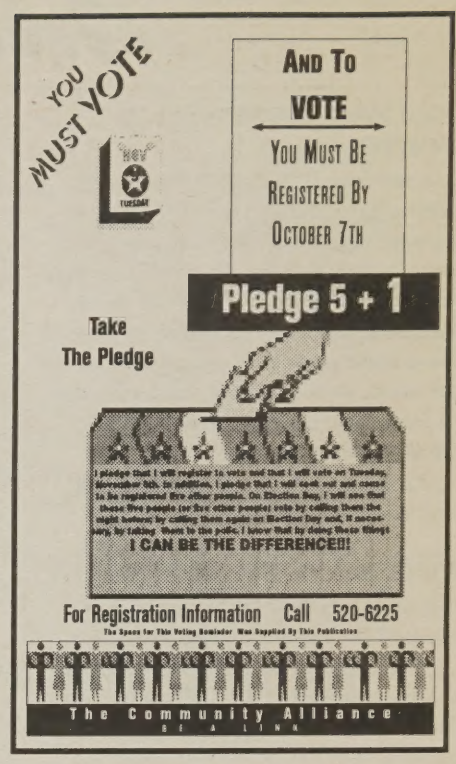
... that 1 in 4 gay and lesbian youths are forced to leave home on account of conflicts with their families about being gay?

... that because they are forced to leave home, gay and lesbian youths constitute up to 25% of all youths living on the streets in the United States?

... that lesbian and gay youths are 2 to 3 times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers. Gay and lesbian youths account for up to 30% of all completed suicides amoung youths.

... that in 1992, 69% of all gay male youths reported a history of school problems, from harrassment to violence, related to their sexual identity?

... that 45% of gay males and 25% of lesbians experience physical or verbal assault in high school? 28% of these young people felt forced to drop out of school due to unbearable harrassment based on sexual orientation.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For Registration Information Call 520-6225
The Community Alliance

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MISSION STATEMENT
Dedicated to securing and maintaining basic civil rights for lesbian. gay, bisexual and transgendered citizens; and to unifying their participation in the community at large through the means of education, coalition, and visibility.

SUSTAINING MEMBER–SPONSORS
Many individuals donated to the fund to support *Someone You Know*. Some chose to be ongoing sponsors on a monthly basis. They are:
D. Miller
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FOUNDATION SUPPORT

The Needmor Fund is a Colorado-based foundation that has as its primary goal the empowerment of those individuals whose basic rights to justice and opportunity are systematically ignored or denied through the funding of grassroots, community-based organizations.

The Chinook Fund is a publicly supported alternative foundation established to provide grants and technical assistance to Colorado grassroots organizations working for progressive social change

The Colin Higgins Fund, advised by the Tides Foundation, funds organizations seeking to effect progressive social change.

The Funding Exchange is a partnership of activists and donors who came together in 1970 to find new ways to support social movements. They coined the phrase "change, not charity" because they believe in the importance of tackling the root causes of poverty and injustice. Allies for Justice is one of their member groups.

The Gill Foundation is a Colorado-based private foundation funding gay, lesbian and bisexual organizations, AIDS organizations, social justice/ human rights advocacy organizations and activities in The Arts that educate about HIV/AIDS, gays, lesbians and bisexuals, and relationships between disenfranchised peoples.

PFLAG

The Colorado Springs Chapter of PFLAG is a non-profit, community-based organization not affiliated with any ethnic, religious, educational, counseling, business or political group.

PFLAG promotes the health and well being of gay, lesbian and bisexual persons, their family and friends, through support to cope with an adverse society; education, to enlighten an ill-informed public; and advocacy, to end discrimination and to secure equal rights. **Meets 2nd Wed of each month, 6:30pm social, 7:00pm meeting time. Call 575-8658 for information.**

Someone You Know is underwritten in part by
Coors Brewing Company

If you or your business is interested in underwriting this insert, please call Ground Zero at 635-6086

Designed to reach the non-gay population of Colorado Springs,
HELP US REFUTE THE MYTHS!!!.
This project costs $15,000 for one year and is funded on an issue to issue basis. We need funding for the rest of the year!
FUTURE ISSUES ARE UP TO YOU!!
Be listed as a sponsor, be a sustaining supporter of this project or send a one time contribution for this important outreach.

Yes! Count Me In!

I want to be a part of** Ground Zero's **project to counter the myths, lies and stereotypes by printing stories about real gays and lesbians and issues in** Someone You Know **to be inserted in** The Independent **monthly. There are two ways to help, by volunteering or by making a contribution:

❒ **Volunteer as a writer, editor or researcher.** ❒ **A One Time Donation of $_____.**

❒ **I want to be a Sustaining supporter in the amount of $_____ per month.**
(I have enclosed the first installment.)

❒ **I want to be listed in the insert as a monthly sponsor at $_____ per month (minimum $25).**
(Enclosed is my first Payment, bill me monthly.)

❒ **Charge my above contribution to my Visa Or Master Card.**
(Sustaining pledges will be automatically charged on the tenth of each month.)

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Name/Name on Card_____ **Phone #**_____
Street/Box_____ **City**_____ **State**_____ **Zip**_____
If Sponsor, name to be listed_____ **Signature**_____

Fill out the form, checking the appropriate box(es) and send to:
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